Adult Education Committee Report to Bridge City Friends

Re: Reviews and discussion of materials from NPYM Committee on the Faith and Practice

Below are the compiled comments from Friends who participated in this process over the past four months. These have been sent to the Committee on the Faith and Practice.

For a review of the process that was used to do this review please see the documents bundled with this one, which have been circulated several times through the list-serv.

My thanks to all who participated. Our process not only will give the Faith and Practice Committee some response to issues they raised in their materials but, perhaps more important than that, gave us the opportunity to engage with one another and our own vision of Friends faith and practice (Quaker process)—of what it means to us to live as Friends.

Timothy Travis
Adult Education Committee

Summary of Comments

1. What is your group’s practice around formulation of minutes? What kinds of decisions are recorded as full, formal minutes? Do you approve the wording of a formal minute during the meeting where the topic is discussed or at a subsequent Meeting for Business.

   Our practice varies from clerk/recording clerk team to team, and with the subject of the minute.

   It doesn't seem important how we do it.

   At a Meeting for Business we usually read over a minute of decision or action to make sure it's correct.

   There are two different kinds of minutes: The first records what was said, like a committee report, and the second is a minute that we want to present to a larger body like the Quarterly Meeting or Yearly Meeting for their action and approval. That kind requires thoughtful wording and maybe even a committee to work on it and bring it to our next meeting for approval.

   I think we should look at the use of technology (e-mails, faxes, etc.) as a way to facilitate and accelerate the seasoning process.
I miss the careful wording, recording, reading and approval of minutes at the time that I have experienced in other meetings. I think it’s an important part of doing Quaker business.

People making reports and recommendations should give a hard copy to the recording clerk for the sake of accuracy and to help the recording clerk.

There are two kinds of minutes. The minute that simply reports what we did or what was said can wait till the next Meeting for Business to be approved. A minute of our reaching unity on a decision should be read back and rewritten if necessary and approved at the time.

During the time between the meeting when a minute is approved and the next monthly meeting we may receive new information or our idea on the subject might be changed.

We should come to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business expecting to be changed.

2. What is your group’s practice and experience around handling serious difference of opinion? Should the section in Faith and Practice give more detail about “standing aside” and “standing in the way”?

It would be helpful to have something to turn to tell us how to deal with such things.

I don't like the use of the word "objection", and it is used often in these paragraphs. We don't come to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business in order to raise objections. We come to find unity. Could we say "is concerned about" or "has issues with" rather than "objection"?

I would like to have more details about "standing aside" and "standing in the way of" so we have a better understanding of what those terms mean. I've heard them, but I don't know if we've ever done that in our meeting.

Like so many aspects of Friends’ Practice there are notional understandings of what it one is saying when one “stands in the way” and what the effect of this is on the meeting. No individual, or even group, necessarily has a veto over anything. It would be good to have an informed discussion about this rather than one in which the only basis for the discussion is the “takes” of which ever of us happens to show up at any particular time.

We, as individuals, need time to catch up. We need to take time, and if we can't
come to agreement we can set the decision off until the next meeting.

We need to listen for God's voice in the decision rather than for what we want to happen.

Decisions are not based on what we “think” we should do but rather an what we are moved to do.

The decision we arrive at should be the right decision for this group at this time. Newcomers often have trouble understanding this.

I need to distinguish between my individual concerns and the unity of the group and that is why I might choose to stand aside.

Standing aside reflects a trust that others are led, not that they have figured out things better or are smarter or “weightier” than I am.

An individual sometimes needs to stand aside if he sees that his objection is getting in the way of moving forward.

I think that the idea of “standing in the way” is misunderstood to mean that any single individual can, on any decision, stop the meeting from acting. It is more complicated than that. It is as much a barrier to process of coming to unity to think that each of us has a veto over every decision as it is to think that we should just vote to decide what we should do. Coming to unity is a process. Finding disagreement is only the first part of that process.

3. What is your group’s practice and experience with “threshing”? Is the description here adequate? If not, what should be added?

Threshing sessions receive minimal use in our meeting.

They are helpful for complex situations. People who are interested come, and people with some expertise in the matter provide information. Threshing sessions are an educational experience.

Threshing is the process of listening.

Yes! We thresh often and we thresh well!"

It's important to lay out ground-rules at the beginning, especially if less experienced Friends are there. We need to have a specific topic which allows us to reach greater depth. With too general a topic we end up with a shallow discussion.
Sometimes threshing sessions are more specific than other times. They can be used to test clearness on a specific action and they can be more like “brainstorming” sessions. It depends where we are in the process on a particular piece of business.

4. The section on Meeting officers and committees could be augmented with specific examples of the different ways Friends within NPYM organize themselves. What offices and committees does your group currently have?

A complete list of our officers and committees can be found in our Nominating Committee Report.

We should attach a copy of that list to this report. How can I get one (Timothy)

5. It has been suggested that Faith and Practice include material about support for Friends in leadership roles – for example, advice to Friends to stay tender toward those who are in leadership positions, and encouragement to accept leadership in faith and without fear. What would be helpful in a paragraph about Quaker leadership?

All of us are part of the Meeting and all of us need to help the clerk, officers, committee clerks and committee members.

Sometimes when someone steps forward we may not be open to their appointment, but we should be supportive and encouraging. Sometimes we are surprised by their success and their growth in the job.

Friends should not “step forward” for leadership roles, at least not openly. The idea of asking people to say what they feel led to do and then using that as the basis for filling slots often leads to mismatches between aptitude and aspiration. Nominating Committee acts in the eldering role in that it considers what people’s talents and inclinations are rather that jobs that need to be done at the moment. Nominating should be constantly trying to place Friends in roles where their talents can be developed and then supporting them in those roles.

Support is especially important for people new to a position.

F&P could include a list of resources these people could turn to.

We mustn't assume that everyone who takes a leadership position will ask for a support committee. Some people hesitate to ask for help and some don't realize they need it. If we see someone struggling or sense a need we should approach them and ask what would be helpful.

The concept of “leadership” among Friends is unclear. Clerks are seen as CEOs
by some, who have imported the contemporary, secular corporate model into the meeting. Originally, the clerk was just that—a functionary and convener. The executive function was vested in elders and the meeting as a whole.

There should be support from one committee to the others in the form of communication. For example, the Nominating Committee should consider communicating with the clerks of other committees as they put together the slate for committee appointments.

6. The Committee on Worship and Ministry and Committee on Oversight are the names most often used in this chapter. Ministry and Oversight Committee is used for combining the functions. What is your preferred name for the committee(s) carrying out these functions?

Ministry and Oversight. Some are beginning to wonder about combining the two functions. Pastoral care seems to eclipse worship and ministry business.

Ministry and Oversight is the collective memory of the meeting.

7. New Material will be added about in a section called Special Challenges in Oversight and Pastoral Care, to include:

   Anti harassment policies
   Members and attenders with criminal history, especially sex offenders
   Members and attenders who tend to be cast out form the wider society
   Members and attenders with mental illnesses

What is your group’s experience with handling these and similar challenges? Do you have guidelines, procedures, policies you cab share?

So many people struggling with their own grief and issues. Became clear that needed to protect the children. We tend to want to come out of ourselves and help them. Need to protect ourselves as a meeting.

Committees can get lost with difficult attenders, sex offenders. How to separate the spiritual needs of these people from their therapy.

We are very clear on dealing with sexual orientation but we have a difficult time with sex offenders who create no more threat, perhaps, in the context of worship, than the other.

Providing safety not therapy. But what is safety? Who defines safety and unsafety.
What we do is not “safe.” What if a prophet shows up? I don’t want to hear that. Different people use the word differently.

Safety of adults and children.

Unwelcome advances are hard to deal with. The meeting has some responsibility to deal with that.

MGOF worked on that for a long time and their experience would be helpful, here.

Do not utilize eldering as part of remediation. Elders are the repository of the wisdom of the group, they are seasoned, and can make a connection on an individual level rather than as a group. Takes complexity out—the guide within them is talking to the guide in person being addressed.

People who have problems with a group tend to withdraw.

But eldering doesn’t always work. But it is the most simple and most likely to work.

Sometimes the elder is resented but the person eldered thinks about it and some good is done.

Eldering might rather be done by someone other than the one offended by a Friend. If one feels someone else needs to be eldered perhaps that person should bring the concern to Ministry and Oversight and, should that consultation result in a unity around the need for eldering that should be carried out by more than one person, none of whom were the originator of the process.

Eldering: Separating out the noun and the verb.

Perhaps people should go to ministry and oversight to self identify.

Is there any affirmation of eldering in a positive sense—encouraging someone who has spoken in meeting and the life has been felt to rise.

Eldering is a form of discernment.

8. Is the description of Clearness Committees (with its footnote) adequate, or should our *Faith and Practice* include more detail on how they work, such as the tradition that Clearness Committee members ask open ended questions and listen, but refrain from giving specific advice?

Sometimes clearness committees take on a long-term identity—committees on
clearness for marriage, for example, should be an on-going entity and be the primary contact point for the meeting as it keeps the marriage under its care.

9. **What is your group’s practice add experience with Care Committees?**

We have had many of them.

There needs to be more awareness of the difference between a support committee and a care committee.

10. *Faith and Practice* currently includes full descriptions of the Worship and Ministry, Oversight and Nominating Committees. Should it include descriptions of other typical committees and their responsibilities and functions?

There is already an ongoing proliferation of committees that taxes the time and energy of Friends

**Our Faith and Practice does not currently include a working definition of “ministry.” how would you define it?**

Friends in ministry section?

difference between a concern and a ministry? concern as a precursor to a ministry?

what benefit is conferred on the individual or the meeting by giving them the title of minister?

is a special category of membership being created.

anyone can ask for a support committee

should faith and practice limit support committee as a matter of course for meeting type activities? Should it specifically mention that support committees can be very helpful to clerks and others with their responsibilities within the meeting.

semantics re concern and ministry-- taking the word to someone versus doing reform.

12. **What is your group’s practice and experience with Friends in Ministry Work--for instance, do you provide “denominational endorsement” for a hospital chaplain, perhaps using a clearness process?**

m and o wrote a letter for a chaplain, business meeting approved--but that didn’t make her a minister here any more than any one else in the Society.
use of word “work” is misleading in the bold title--should say professional as they will still do the work.

13. The Committee on the Discipline has heard form Friends that our Faith and Practice should include more material bout support for Friends in ministry work such as chaplaincy, counseling and spiritual direction. The Committee now senses a tension arising: we want to acknowledge and support members doing “ministry work” in their professional lives but we do not acknowledge and support members doing “ministry work” within our meetings and within the Society. It’s not within the Committee’s scope to suggest changes in NPYM practice; it is within our scope to point our possible inconsistencies and encourage discussion. What do you think?

No.

Why would there need for material support these occupations rather than others (teachers, nurses, etc). material professional support is available elsewhere.

What does the first part of this question mean?

could it mean that people are looking for substitutes for professional services (say therapy) through support committees.

dangerous to say some person or another is a resource for the meeting based on some professional standard

ethical line

hospital chaplains need recognition for certification purposes--no status in the society and no special support unless they feel the need

What is your group’s practice and experience with Support Committees?

We have had committees that have acted as elders to Friends released for work in the wider Society and those that have acted as elders for those with positions of responsibility within the meeting--the clerk. Are these different functions?

No, they are not different. It’s support for people doing a difficult job whether it’s inside or outside the meeting.

Different than a care committee for someone who is ill or in some kind of difficulty.

Makes sense to keep straight whether it’s support, discernment /clearness or care that the committee is set up to do. One may turn into the other but one purpose at a time.
The current PYM *Faith and Practice* includes a few sentences concerning children, incorporated into Committee on Worship & Ministry/Committee on Oversight descriptions. Friends have identified several topics to be added to NPYM’s *Faith and Practice*, including

- First Day School - with cross-ref to “religious education and study” in the “Faith” part of the book. Might include: First Day School Committee is not just for parents! Curriculum, activities, and projects to reflect our wide range of faith and practice
- Children’s Safety to include: care for physical safety; recommendation to have 2 adults in supervision, not just 1; Friends and mandatory reporting
- Transition to Adulthood - with cross-ref to chapter on membership. Might include: care for young people is for the whole Meeting, not just one committee; recognition of milestones such as HS graduation; nurturing spiritual gifts and spiritual contributions of young people; encouraging participation in meeting for worship

The Committee on the Discipline also suggests borrowing and adapting some material from Intermountain Yearly Meeting’s *Faith and Practice*, pp. 91-95. This material is included in the draft chapter for NPYM review. Is it suitable? Is there anything that NPYM Friends would add, subtract, alter?

What’s missing from this material that you find central to the right ordering of a Monthly Meeting?

there may be material that friends find quite central but establishing it as such can straightjacket the future actions of Friends.

Are there parts of this section that you think would belong better in some other part of the *Faith & Practice*? Parts that you think could be deleted?

What books, pamphlets, articles, or other resources can you recommend about the right ordering of a Monthly Meeting?

several Pendle Hill Pamphlets-- e.g., A Place Called Community, Integrity

is the creation of a bibliography creating an orthodoxy or it is more like suggestions for helpful reading?